

# The Freudian Slip

Pathways to Discernment

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## *The Bumpier Road More Traveled*

### The Speed Bumps of Life

Someone came up with the idea of having rules for life. The first rule is, "Don't sweat the small stuff." The second rule is, "Everything is small stuff." To the causal observer, who experiences life's ups and downs, these rules are rather difficult to follow. Life has been described by many as a road.

Sometimes this road has minor dips, speed bumps, and potholes varying in size. The result of each of these is the same, difficulties and problems. How each of us handles these kinds of obstacles depends on our perception of life.

For some of us, the road of life is full of menacing dangers. Whenever a speed bump, a dip or a pothole is encountered, the individual is "a spread eagle" on the pavement, remaining there permanently or getting "stuck" for extended periods of time. Others hit these obstacles, fall and decide to stay there for a long time. Still others would hit a pothole, trip and fall, remaining there for a short time. Then there are those that would see the obstacle, either avoiding it or bouncing back after a fall.

How is each group of people different from each other? One difference is attitude .. The "spread eagle" group sees all obstacles as "larger than life" and finds them impossible to surmount. The stuck group experiences the obstacle as an impossibility to cross and gets stuck in the "ain't it awful's" of the situation, deciding to stay. The next group experiences the obstacle as extremely difficult, not seeing the escape path as obvious. The last group experiences the obstacle realistically knowing he or she has options in approaches or solutions to the problem.

The central belief of the individual is the reason for placement in either of these different groups. The individuals seeing themselves and others as always being awful, has a belief of "life is always the pits, and there is no hope of it ever changing." To them,

perception of self and others is that of "gloom and doom." The negatives of life eclipse the positives of life, so they are not seen.

The beliefs of the next group revolve around the issue of blame. When problems occur, this group takes total responsibility for what happened, without assigning half of the responsibility to others. Problems are experienced as a punishment for failing, doing wrong, and/ or just existing. Problems are personalized, so that the individual is always bad. The negatives of life eclipse the positives of life. Much effort is expended to see anything that is positive about the individual's life.

The third group sees problems are the result of others' and only others. The belief involved, focuses only on the faults of others and not on them. "If it wasn't for you, ... " is a frequent statement heard from this group. Others are seen as either failing, doing wrong and/ or existing to these individuals. Problems are still personalized, in that they are a reflection on the individual as a result of others actions. The negatives of life eclipse the positives, because of it is "their fault."

The beliefs of the last group reflect an ability to not

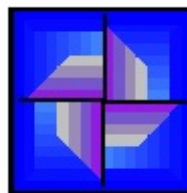
### The Freudian Slip

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personalize problems or place total blame on themselves or others. Obstacles are not viewed as mountains, but as mole hills. Translated, these individuals have the attitude that they have the inner confidence to "make it" through the problem no matter how difficult it is.

These individuals tend to be good problem solvers. They are alert to problems before they arise or they are able to think their way through when one occurs. The negatives and the positives of life are equally seen, but these individuals are able to move through the bad things to the good.

Along with attitude, another difference in each group relates to previous experiences. When an obstacle arises, the first three groups have a tendency to give up and allow despair to be their ruling emotion. The reason being, they have not succeeded in their lives. This does not mean that this group has never tried to overcome an obstacle. It does mean, that their history does not give them much confidence in their ability to overcome the obstacle.

What is common among these groups, is the inability to see the solution outside of the "box." This resulting "tunnel vision" keeps the focus only on the problem and not the resources available that are out of view. By focusing only on what is obviously blocking a person's path, creativity is squashed.

Lessons learned or not learned from previous experience reflects on the overuse of "tunnel vision" as a problem solving tool. This is one critical factor in dealing with life's speed bumps. When a lesson is learned, an individual regroup and decides not to do something in the same manner or at all. An example would be a young child learning that the eye of a stove is hot. If a lesson is learned, the child will not touch the stove when it is turned on. If a lesson has not been learned, the child will get burned again and again.

One reason for the overuse of "tunnel vision" relates to comfort level. In doing things the same way each time, each of us finds comfort in the repetitiveness. We can predict how others will act and what the outcome usually will be. We derive a sense of security from the routines of life. However, when we or someone else acts differently in a familiar situation, we become anxious. We do not know what to expect, so we tend to get real "antsy" about change.

So when problems are approached in the same manner, time after time, there is a certain level of comfort present for the individual. He or she knows what to expect, and then can respond appropriately to

the situation. An example could be if a person dislikes conflict so much, that he or she keeps peace at all costs. By keeping everyone "happy," conflict is avoided and life continues on as expected. However, if this same example were approached differently, the individual does not know what to expect from the others. A sense of impending doom is the overriding feeling in this situation.

Using the components of attitude, experience, and comfort, an individual can learn to negotiate the speed bumps of life. To obtain an appropriate attitude about problems, an individual needs to be able to separate out his or her part in the problem. Questions to ask oneself, would reflect the "how's," "what's," "why's" and "who's" of the situation. A positive attitude is reflected in how these questions are answered, in that they are not a platform to brutalize oneself.

Experience helps alert a person to the speed bumps, either avoiding or conquering them. "When I \_\_\_ this usually happens," or "When this happened the last time, I \_\_\_" can be a means of avoiding and/or conquering problems. So a prudent response to these statements can be, "how can I do this differently?"

Comfort is learned. When we do things for the first time, we feel uncomfortable. However, with repetition our comfort level increases over time. When problem solving in a different manner causes discomfort, check the reason for the discomfort. Is it because this is the first time this approach has been used? Is there real danger in using this approach?

With any approach to problem solving, mistakes happen. The important part of mistakes is what can be learned from them. Remember that we all did not all start out walking when we were babies. We fell a few times before we got the hang of this walking thing! So when an individual falls, instead of self or other blaming, look at how it could have been done differently. Remember, the plan is what failed, not the person.

### Suggested Readings:

*The Dance of Fear* by Harriet Lerner Ph.D.

*Overcoming Depression* by Paul Hauck Ph.D.

*Hinds Feet on High Places* by Hannah Hurnard

*The Language of Letting Go* by Melody Beatty

*Who's Pushing Your Buttons* by John Townsend

*Restoring Hope & Trust* by Lisa Lewis, Ph.D.